



SOHI District Master Plan

April 2007

Prepared for the SOHI District
as part of the Main Street Milwaukee Program



Architecture | Engineering | Planning

Services provided in cooperation with:

Main Street Milwaukee

West End Development Corporation

City of Milwaukee Department of City Development

Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) Milwaukee

Downtown Professionals Network - Visioning and Strategic Planning Report June 2005

SOHI Design Committee -

Chairs: Brian Scotty and James Steiner

SOHI Main Street Manager - Keith Stanley

SOHI District Master Plan

April 2007



Architecture | Engineering | Planning

Contents:

I. Introduction

- Master plan area
- History
- Built Environment
- Main Street Milwaukee Program
- Vision
- Challenges and Opportunities
- Guiding Principles

II. Street Elements

- Street Section
- Street Trees
- Sidewalk Extensions
- Paving at intersections
- Gateways

III. Master Plan

- Overall
- Block plans



I Introduction

MASTER PLAN AREA

The SOHI (SOUth of HIGHLand) District is centered on North 27th Street from West Highland Boulevard south to St. Paul Street. The district can be accessed with relative ease from U.S. Interstate 94 lying immediately south of the district. East-West streets intersecting with North 27th Street, including State Street, Wisconsin Avenue and Wells Street, are heavily traveled local routes providing ready access to Milwaukee's downtown area. North 27th Street is part of the daily experience of neighborhood residents, employees, and commuters, serving as a western gateway to Milwaukee's downtown area.

HISTORY

The district developed as a retail center between 1880 and 1920. The 27th Street corridor is central to six neighborhoods that surround it including Avenues West, Concordia, Cold Spring Park and Merrill Park. These neighborhoods were early - and very affluent - suburbs of Milwaukee. As the city grew, the early mansions that graced the area were demolished and replaced with largely 1 bedroom and studio apartments to serve the needs of employees working at several hospitals that were built in the district. The hospitals are gone, but the apartments are not. Today 85% of the housing in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the district is multi-unit and only 13% of housing is owner-occupied according to Census 2000 neighborhood data.

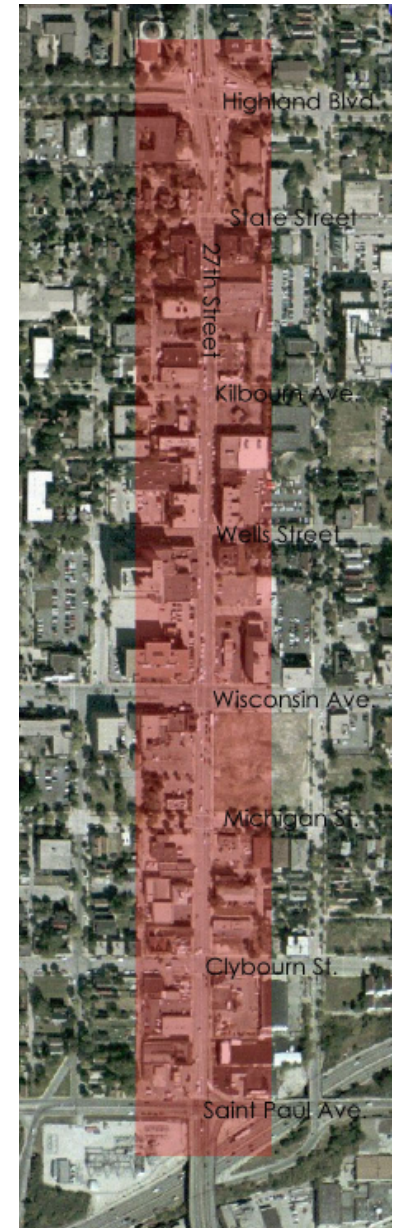
The district's commercial buildings, some dating back to the 1800's, serve as reminders of the district's storied history. Most commercial buildings were built between 1910 and 1950, with Vernacular, Mediterranean, Classic Revival and Modern architectural styles and features being dominant. Buildings in the district are generally low scale - two to four stories and house a mix of retail and service businesses. The highest concentration of commercial development extends North of Wisconsin Avenue along 27th Street. Over time, the SOHI district has become a neighbor to some of Milwaukee's most significant employers and institutions including Marquette University, SBC, Miller Brewing and Harley-Davidson.



27th and Wisconsin c. 1900
Image: Milwaukee Public Library



Tower Theater



SOHI Area Map

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The SOHI District is home to 53 commercial buildings situated within the North 27th Street corridor, spanning about seven city blocks. While some of the more recent commercial development within the district has not been sympathetic to its surrounding neighbors, other developments such as West End Development Corporation's (WEDC) WestPointe redevelopment project, are breathing new life into the district's historic structures to accommodate new commercial and residential uses that stand to inject new life into the district's economy.

The district's building stock is in various states of repair with many in need of maintenance. Signs of relatively recent and ongoing investments made to improve certain buildings are evident along the street, ranging from simple "clean-up and fix-up" efforts to more extensive building restoration and improvement projects. Other buildings are in obvious need of attention and maintenance, ranging from simple cleaning, painting and sign improvements to more extensive improvement that could include the removal of inappropriate materials and treatments that have been applied to various buildings over the course of time. There is much work to be done and every new long-term investment in the district goes a long way in the overall revitalization effort.

The majority of parking for the district is located in marked spaces along North 27th Street and side streets to the east and west. Most off-street parking in the district is privately owned and generally restricted for the use of employees and residents.

The district's streets and sidewalks are in need of repair. Reconstruction of the North 27th Street corridor's street and streetscape is currently scheduled for 2010. Beyond the deteriorating conditions of the district's streets and sidewalks, weeds, litter and streetscape features in obvious need of maintenance, repair or replacement adversely affect the aesthetic qualities of the district and its image as a place to live, work or do business.

THE MAIN STREET MILWAUKEE PROGRAM

The SOHI District is one of four Milwaukee commercial districts that was awarded Main Street Milwaukee designation in March of 2005. Main Street Milwaukee is a collaborative effort between the City of Milwaukee Department of City Development and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). The program uses \$35,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds and matches it with private resources contributed by partners. The program is a comprehensive, city-wide approach to neighborhood economic development that utilizes a proven method to increase investment in urban neighborhoods, create new businesses, create jobs, and create wealth in urban communities.

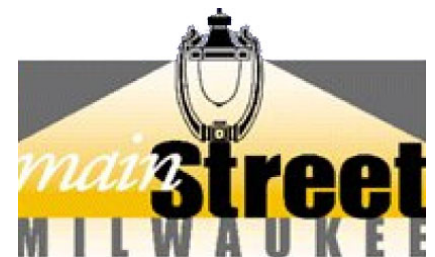
SOHI Main Street, in collaboration with Main Street Milwaukee, partnered with HGA Architects to develop a master plan vision for the district. HGA worked closely with the SOHI Design Committee, which includes area residents, stakeholders and community leaders to establish the overall direction for the master plan.



West Pointe Condos
27th Street and Wells Street



Rehab Retail and Office space
27th Street and State Street



VISION FOR THE SOHI DISTRICT

The aim of the master plan is to provide a vision for a vibrant and pedestrian-friendly district known to be safe and well-maintained. The buildings will represent the strength and stability of the district and house a diverse range of shopping and dining experiences. The right balance of small retail shops and larger anchor stores is key to the success of the development. The goal is for the SOHI district to become a unique area to experience culture, to shop, to live, to gather and to explore.

Quality is stressed throughout the master plan. Homeowners, renters and business owners are encouraged to maintain their properties with pride and dignity. Facade rehabilitation and signage will display a high level of pride, and the mixed-use nature of the SOHI district properties should provide a visual and economic mark of stability.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Create a strong positive identity for the SOHI District
- Quality buildings with a diversity of architectural expression
- Safe and clean streets - well-lit, well-maintained
- Enhanced pedestrian experience
- Unique retail and dining to the area

Ultimately, the goal for development in the SOHI district is to create attractive patterns of development that support the community's vision, and result in the highest and best use of the limited land resources in the district. As the conditions of the SOHI district are understood, the ability to review opportunities for change must also be considered. A range of factors is useful in this analysis including - regulatory, site and/or building, market, ownership and community factors.



Concept rendering for a redevelopment in the SOHI District
W. Palmowski



Proposed development at 27th Street and Wisconsin Ave.
Sherman & Associates

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout the master plan document, recommendations have been made based on assessment by the Design Committee and other stakeholders. Certain assumptions and interpretations were made, and an indication of change on a particular parcel does not necessarily mean that a parcel or area *must* change. Similarly, an indication of a particular parcel to remain does not mean that a parcel or area should not change or that change won't happen at some point. The plan creates a vision for future development in the district while at the same time addressing the reality of what exists. In an ideal situation, some developments shown as “existing to remain” on the master plan might in fact become a home for a new and higher use.

The plan creates a vision for future development while at the same time addressing the reality of what currently exists in the district. While ideally, developments such as chain fast food restaurants might be replaced with a mixed-use building housing a unique restaurant on the first floor, it is understood that existing franchise businesses, though not ideal in their architectural design, might have a place in the neighborhood fabric if they are well-maintained and cared for. In many instances, if the owners of existing buildings within the district invest in revitalizing and improving their properties to attract long-term reputable tenants, the possibility for a complete turn-around on that parcel would be possible. Quality lighting, signage and safety measures would go a long way toward improving several of the properties on 27th Street. This master plan encourages development that will enhance the character of the district and contribute to a thriving environment for living, working and shopping.

The implementation of the master plan will take time. Revitalization is something that will occur over a period of years. While some changes may be visible immediately, others will take longer to be fully realized. The hope is that the district will evolve and grow over time into a unique center for culture, entertainment and living. This philosophy is consistent with the Main Street Approach to Revitalization that provides a framework for local initiatives in the areas of Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Restructuring that, collectively, address the many aspects of a neighborhood commercial district to affect positive changes in a methodical, incremental fashion.

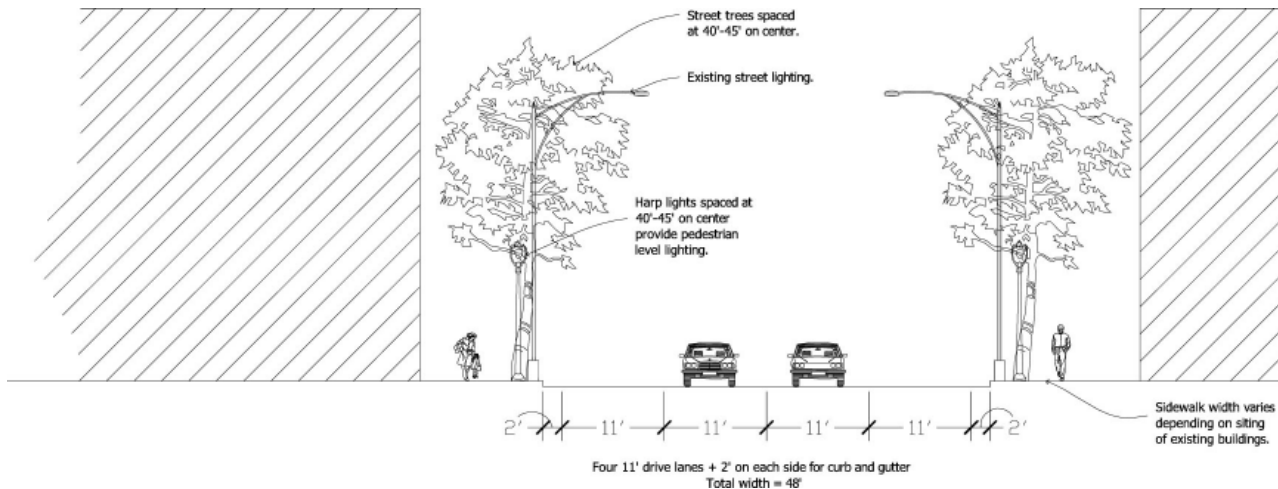


The corridor of North 27th Street is scheduled for street reconstruction in 2010. This major reconstruction effort provides the SOHI district with the unique opportunity to make recommendations for proposed improvements to the street. These improvements would include the widening of sidewalks to the greatest degree possible, the addition of street trees and planters, specialty paving at intersections, and the extension of the harp lights currently located only on portions of 27th Street within the district. The Design Committee has engaged in an ongoing dialogue with representatives from the Department of City Development as well as the Department of Public Works to discuss possible options for improving the streetscape. The recommendations below are the result of discussions with these parties.

The goals of these streetscape improvements are:

- improve pedestrian access
- beautify the street edge
- provide a safe and welcoming atmosphere within the district.

PROPOSED STREET SECTION



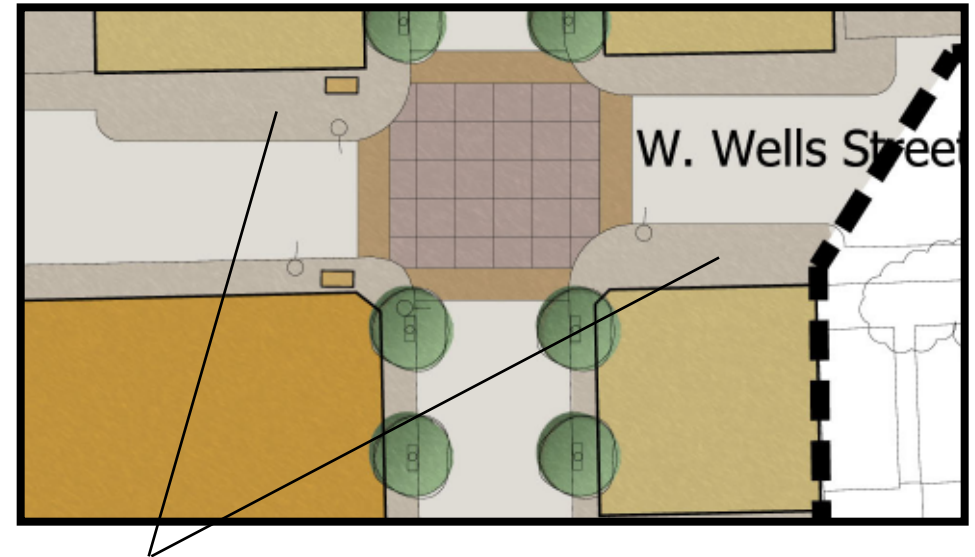
STREET TREES

The addition of street trees along the 27th Street corridor will greatly enhance the quality of the pedestrian experience. The commercial street will be improved through unifying elements such as paving, lighting and street trees - all of which make the street more attractive to shoppers and provide a continuous element of scale.

The district hopes to work closely with the Department of Urban Forestry to determine the best trees to fit the 27th Street corridor. The design of the street trees will be impacted by the volume of pedestrians, the size and orientation of sidewalks, the distance from trees to buildings, the visibility of facades and signage, and the speed and volume of vehicles. Trees are to be planted with regular spacing to create a continuous street edge. Appropriate tree grates will be selected based on sidewalk width and the type of tree used.

PROPOSED SIDEWALK EXTENSIONS

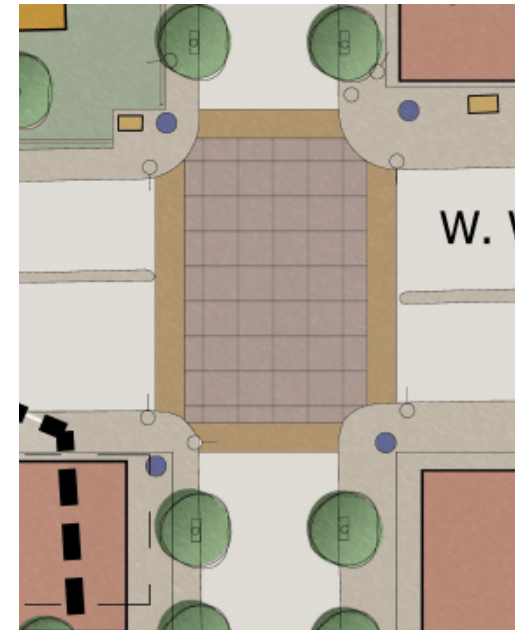
One of the existing conditions of the street section of the SOHI District is that there is often little sidewalk space from the building to the curb. This makes for particularly cramped areas at intersections. Intersections such as the one at 27th Street and Wells Street are a prime example. The building sits close to the street edge resulting in little sidewalk width for pedestrians to circulate, and even less if there are people waiting at a bus stop or at the crosswalk. In addition, business that might be interested in opening up their storefronts to have sidewalk seating are unable to do so because of the restricted width. A solution to this issue has been explored in this master plan. By creating sidewalk extensions or “bump outs” on the cross streets, some of the congestion at the corners is alleviated and business owners have a greater amount of sidewalk space. The space in which the extensions occur is not typically used for parking currently as it is too close to the corner. Therefore, street parking spaces would not be impacted. The image to the right illustrates the extension.



Extensions at opposite sides of street. Bump-outs extend approximately 9'-10' into street - the same width as a parking space. The extensions shown run approximately 75' past the intersection.

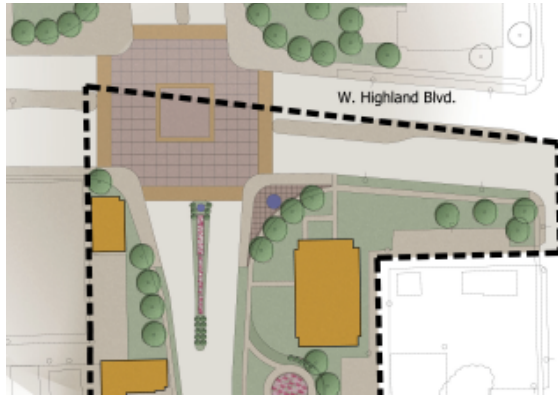
PROPOSED PAVING AT INTERSECTIONS

In an effort to distinguish 27th Street as the most important corridor in the SOHI District, specialty paving has been included in the master plan at each of the intersections. The City of Milwaukee has employed this same concept in the form of stamped concrete in several neighborhoods and at key intersections within the city - i.e. the intersection of Oakland Avenue and North Avenue on the East Side, on Wisconsin Avenue and near the Public Market in the Third Ward. The addition of this design feature would help to beautify the street as well as to create a unified identity throughout the district. The image on the right shows an example of this paving.



DISTRICT GATEWAY MONUMENTS

North Gateway:
Highland Boulevard



Central Gateway: Wisconsin Avenue



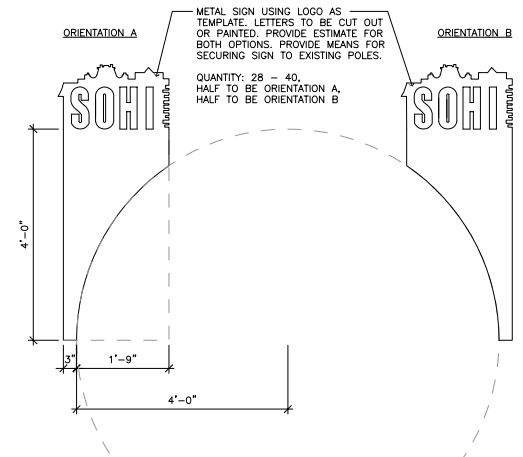
Southern Gateway: W. St. Paul Street



LAMP POST IDENTIFICATION SIGNAGE

Entry signage and monuments can be a source of pride for residents and give identity to the neighborhood. Gateway signage placed at the intersections of Highland and Saint Paul - the north and south ends of the district, and at Wisconsin Avenue - a key high-traffic intersection within the district provide an experience of entry and unity within the district. The signage, coupled with speciality paving, provides variety and helps to define the space. SOHI signs on lamp posts serve to help people identify the district and provide a unifying feature.

A proposed design for the lamp post signage is shown on the right. Gateway signage has not yet been determined. It is the hope of those in the district that work could be commissioned with an artist or other designer that will accurately reflect the character of the SOHI District through this signage. The design of the entry monuments and lamp post signage should be integrated with the total design of typical street elements. The scale, character, shape, materials and location of entry monuments should be thoroughly planned and consistent for the entire district. Provisions must also be made for the maintenance of the monuments and signage once they are in place.



III Masterplan

1 27th Street Highland Boulevard to State Street

Existing character of block:

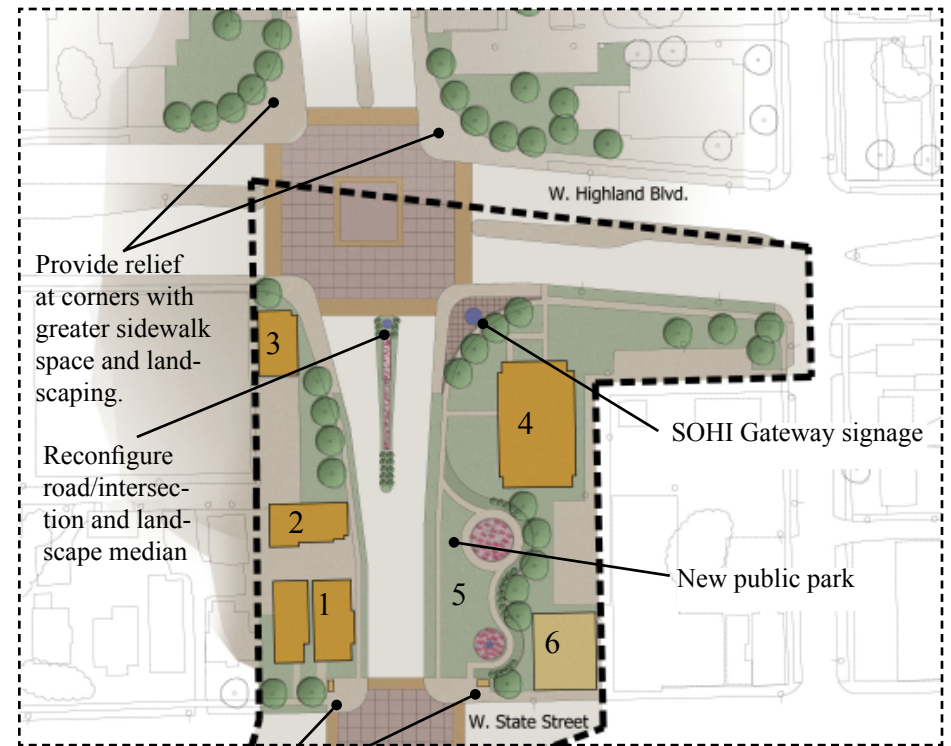
This block signifies the North end of the SOHI District. It serves as a transition zone between the commercial zone of 27th Street between Wisconsin and State Street, and the residential zone of the blocks North of Highland. The intersection at Highland and 27th is heavily trafficked and is somewhat difficult for pedestrians to navigate. Traffic back-up is an issue the entire length of the block.

Proposed Plan Elements:

- The key element proposed in the plan is the redevelopment of the intersection. This includes the addition of gateway signage, a landscaped median, and 'filling out' the corners to create a safer zone of travel for pedestrians. Relief is also provided at the corner of State Street for bus shelters, providing a safer area for pedestrians to wait for transit or pass through.
- Proposed redevelopment of site 5 into an public park. This would be a possible location for the installation of public art.
- Addition of street trees and landscaping to soften edges of street.
- Specialty paving at intersections.

Current Building Use & Physical Description:

1. Existing residential properties
2. Existing residential property
3. Existing residential property
4. Existing multi-family residential property
5. Vacant land
6. Proposed rehab of existing 1 story brick building



Provide relief at corner by creating larger sidewalk space at bus shelters

- Existing Building
- Rehab - Proposed or In Progress
- Proposed New



27th Street State Street to Kilbourn Avenue

Existing character of block:

One of the key features of this block is a small green space with a mural representing the SOHI District painted on an adjacent building. There are also some existing buildings with stronger exterior character that could be greatly enhanced by rehabilitating the facades and first floor storefronts. There are some problematic properties on this block where redevelopment is recommended.

Proposed Plan Elements:

- Rehab of storefront on sites 1, 2 and 5. Create openings on Kilbourn Avenue at site 1 for greater visibility around corner (safety).
- New development on site 3. Residential or mixed use, 3-4 stories
- Improvements to green space to create an urban pocket park at site 7. Add seating, landscaping, public art, lighting, etc...
- Redevelop site 8. Medium box retail acceptable, but parking is to be well landscaped and tucked behind building as much as possible.
- Street trees at 40' on center.
- Maintain existing harp lights
- Special paving at intersections

Current Building Use & Physical Description:

1. 2-story commercial buildings housing Kilbourn Kitchen and Laabs medical products.
2. 3-story mixed-use building, quality architecture
3. 4-story residential building, poor street presence, problematic to street
4. 3-story mixed-use building undergoing rehab, quality architecture, needs first floor improvements
5. 3-story mixed-use building undergoing rehab
6. 3 story mixed-use building- recently rehabilitated.
7. Green space - north wall of adjacent building has SOHI mural courtyard
8. 1-story retail - Family Dollar, poor street presence
9. 1-story fast food restaurant- Wendy's franchise/chain architecture inconsistent with urban, pedestrian street. However, well landscaped and maintained



Street Trees spaced at 40'
on center

- Existing Building
- Rehab - Proposed or In Progress
- Proposed New



3 27th Street Kilbourn Avenue to Wells Street

Existing character of block:

This block has a few quality buildings, however, most are in need of rehab, particularly at street level. There are also some parcels near the north end of the block that need to be redeveloped. The building on site 7 has recently been redeveloped into condominium units with retail on the first floor. This development increases the number of owner occupied units in the area, which is one of the goals of the redevelopment plan. The district would like to see more of this type of development along with strong retail tenants to act as anchors to the buildings.

Proposed Plan Elements:

- Rehab on site 1 facade, particularly at street level. New signage and storefront at minimum. New retail tenant.
- Redevelop sites 2, 3 and 4. Replace with mixed-use development, 3-5 stories.
- Make improvements to first floor street elevation of site 5.
- Rehab facade of site 6.
- Addition of street trees at 40' on center.
- Addition of special paving at intersections.
- Maintain harp lights already in place on this block.

Current Building Use & Physical Description:

1. 4-story building with retail and office tenants
2. 3-story residential building
3. Vacant fast food restaurant - building to be demolished.
4. Fast food restaurant - Judy's Red Hots. Building is set back from street.
5. Penfield Children's Center - brutal on street edge with no windows at eye-level. Design of building and signage not consistent with desired character of district. Loitering is a major problem on this site.
6. 3-story mixed-use with retail on first floor
7. 4-story mixed-use with condos on upper levels. Recently redeveloped.



Street Trees may not be feasible at this location because of building's proximity to street edge.

Street Trees spaced at 40' on center

- Existing Building
- Rehab - Proposed or In Progress
- Proposed New



4 27th Street Wells Street to Wisconsin Avenue

Existing character of block:

The intersection of 27th and Wisconsin is key to the identity of the SOHI District. Because of the large volume of traffic utilizing Wisconsin Avenue, gateway signage is indicated on all four corners. The Wisconsin Avenue school is a large property on the corner of 27th and Wisconsin owned by MPS. The future of this building is uncertain, but the use and potential redevelopment of this land is important in establishing the character of the SOHI district.

Proposed Plan Elements:

- New development on site 5. Marquee anchor building to be placed on site. Some special treatment of the site will be required since the existing use is a gas station.
- Redevelopment of site 3, potential redevelopment of site 1.
- Site 2 is a high quality existing building that is in need of strong tenants, especially on the first floor. Empty storefronts characterize this commercial building.
- Redevelop the existing parking area at site 4 to become a public parking area for shoppers and visitors to the district. Provide landscaping and fence to beautify the parcel.
- Addition of harp lights
- Addition of street trees at 40' on center (see Details section)
- Addition of SOHI gateway signage as indicated
- Addition of special paving at intersections

Current Building Use & Physical Description:

1. Wisconsin Avenue School - future use unknown.
2. Old Tower Theater building. 2-story commercial building. Partially vacant.
3. 3-story mixed-use. Building is under new ownership and undergoing rehab into retail and office or residential
4. County parking lot
5. Gas station



5 27th Street Wisconsin Avenue to Michigan Street

Existing character of block:

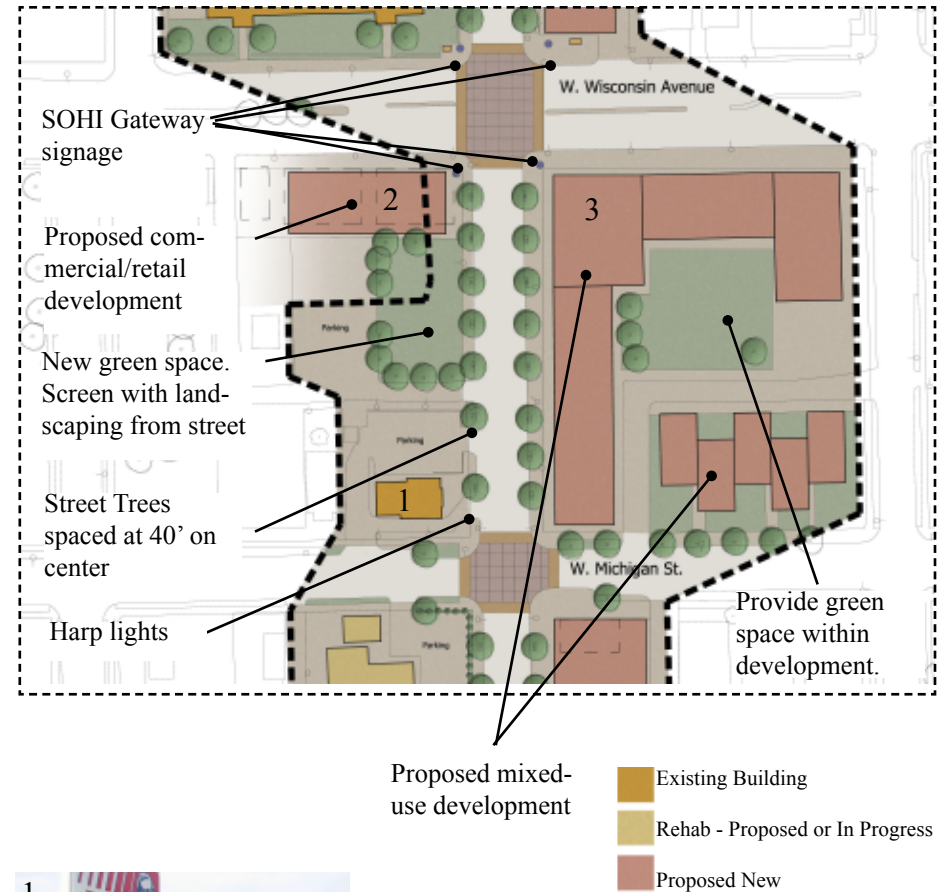
The entire block East of 27th Street between Michigan Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue is vacant. A new mixed-use development with both rental units and condominiums has been proposed. Much of the West side of the block is also vacant and properties on the Wisconsin Avenue edge are run down. This intersection is of particular importance because of the high visibility on Wisconsin Avenue. The Gateway signage indicates to passing traffic that 27th Street is the key corridor of the SOHI District.

Proposed Plan Elements:

- New development on sites 2 and 3
- New green space, screened from 27th Street. Public parking tucked behind with alley access. New greenspace to serve those living and working in the area. Also an opportunity for a public art installation
- Addition of harp lights
- Addition of street trees at 40' on center (see Details section)
- Addition of SOHI gateway signage at all four corners as indicated
- Addition of special paving at intersections

Current Building Use & Physical Description:

1. KFC, 1 story franchise architecture with drive-thru. Nicely landscaped.
2. Grand Foods and Get-It-Now retail buildings.
3. Vacant land.



6 27th Street Michigan Street to Clybourn Street

Existing character of block:

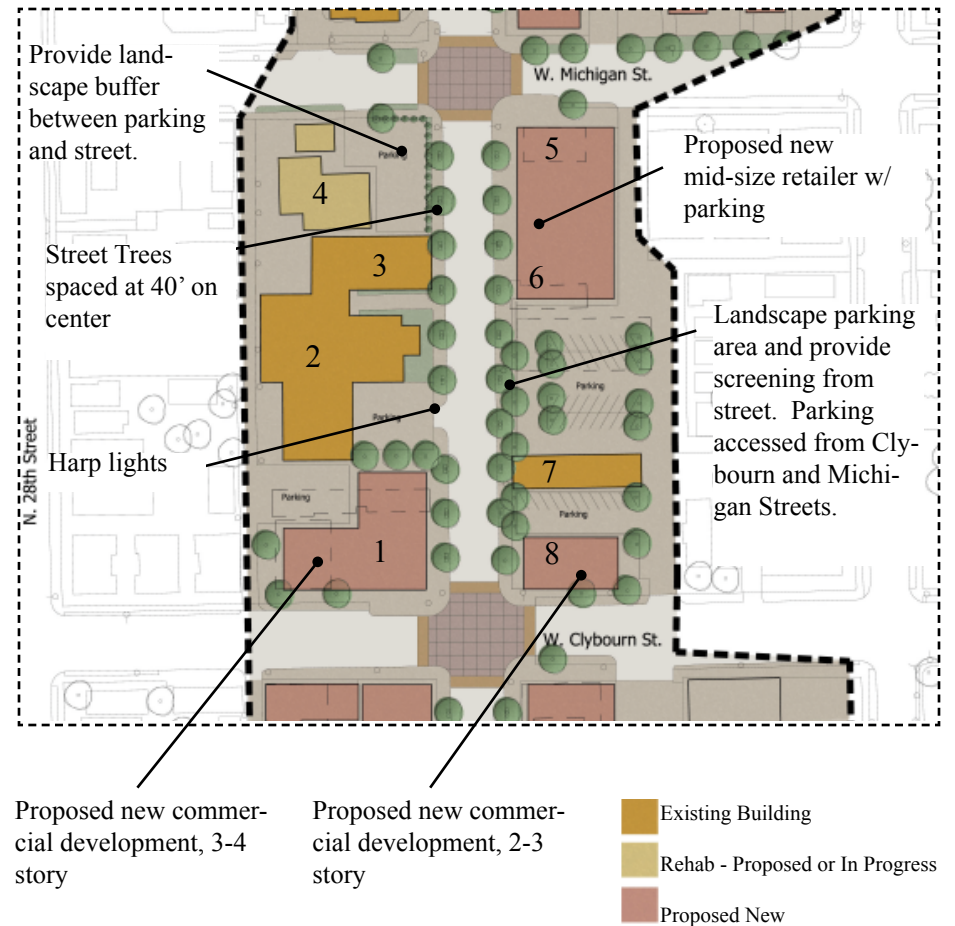
This block of 27th is located in a zone of transition between the more developed blocks North of Wisconsin Avenue and the lesser developed, more industrial blocks south of Clybourn Street. The Academy Music Studio (parcel 2) is a landmark building on the street with a strong presence. Much of the East side of this block sits vacant or undeveloped.

Proposed Plan Elements:

- New development on sites 1, 5, 6 and 8
- Renovation and landscape screening of site 4, some storefront renovation to site 3
- Addition of harp lights spaced at 40'-45' on center
- Addition of special paving at intersections
- Addition of street trees spaced at 40'-45' on center

Current Building Use & Physical Description:

1. Dry Cleaner, 2 story, drive-thru along North face of building
2. Academy Music Studio, 2-3 story monumental building
3. Neighborhood Housing Services, 1 story
4. Laundry, 1 story with parking in front of building
5. Former day care, 1 story, vacant former fast-food restaurant
6. Residential building, 2 story
7. Law office and worship facility, 1 story
8. Vacant parcel



7 27th Street Clybourn Street to Saint Paul Avenue

Existing character of block:

This portion of 27th is highly underdeveloped in its present state. Several of the buildings are vacant, and those that are occupied are in need of extensive renovation. This portion of 27th Street has been neglected for some time as evidenced by the condition of the buildings and the vacant land/buildings on the block.

This block is important to the SOHI District because it can be seen as a southern gateway to the district from the highway. The character of the block needs to be developed so that it is consistent with the improvements taking place in the other blocks within the district. Potential linkages to the Menomonee Valley via the 27th Street bridge could also be explored.

Proposed Plan Elements:

- New development on sites 1, 4, and 5
- Addition of harp lights spaced 40'-45' on center
- Addition of street trees spaced at 40'-45' on center
- Addition of SOHI Gateway signage as indicated
- Renovation and adaptive reuse of site 2
- Potential environmental issues at properties on site 4. Clean-up necessary to redevelop these properties.
- Site 5 targeted for a larger footprint retail development. Potential to use the entire East block of 27th between St. Paul and Clybourn for this type of development. Retail building should address urban conditions - storefront and ease of access for pedestrians, landscape around building and in parking area, buffer between parking and street. No windowless or unarticulated elevations facing 27th Street.

Current Building Use & Physical Description:

1. Gas Station, 1 story
2. Vacant, 3 story brick building
3. Vet Clinic, 1 story, no windows on 27th
4. Auto Body & Mr. P Tires, 1 story, clutter on site, no street presence
5. Child Care, 1 story on corner, Fabco building on Clybourn and storage lot for equipment, old glass block building at corner of 27th and Saint Paul.

